

****PLEASE NOTE THAT TYPOS ARE MY (MS. PAXTON'S) FAULT. I RETYPED THIS RIGHT BEFORE CLASS AND HAVEN'T EDITED IT.

In a world of Losers

Dear Reader,

I am delighted to inform you that you are a loser. This may come as a surprise to you, but I assure you, no matter how successful you think you are, this statement stands true. Society has taught us to praise the individual's wins and discount his or her losses. But who decided losses aren't tantamount to successes? You may possess a skewed conception of what losing means, but I hope to redefine this seemingly derogatory term and help you, my fellow loser realize that it is a label made to be worn proudly.

In order to understand the significance and beauty of losing you must understand three aspects of the concept: the process, who's keeping score and the need to lose.

Many people fail to recognize that losing is a process rather than an episodic occurrence. Of course, a loss begins with a goal. This goal may be made subconsciously or with intense planning; nonetheless, any loss happens as a result of a failed pursuit. Once you have failed though, are you automatically a loser? Of course you are, but this is where the perspective is skewed. Now that you've experienced the loss, what matters is how you respond.

President Heber J. Grant, past prophet of the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, related a story in which he demonstrated the short but significant process of losing. As a child, Grant dreamed of playing on the local little league baseball team. Unfortunately, he was laughed at after his first attempt at the sport for "throwing like a girl." Immediately Grant's peers had him labeled as a loser and figured he would never become a successful baseball player. Yes, Grant was a loser, but in his moment of decision he responded by challenging himself to practice daily to improve his throwing ability. By the next year, Grant managed to make

the team and went on to win the Utah Territorial Championship. In the moment, Grant was a loser, but following his loss, he responded by enduring rather than quitting and turned his loss into a success.

I have experienced this same process of losing. But losing has been a good thing because it has allowed me to progress further than I ever would have if I had always won. My most fortunate loss occurred last spring when I lost a student government election for the first time in five years. I'd won every election since I first ran for a position in student government in seventh grade. Winning became something I expected, but at the end of my junior year, my winning streak came to an end. For years I had dreamed of becoming a Student Body Officer in high school. I was devastated. But like President Grant, I decided to not let my loss deter me. I realized that my loss wasn't a roadblock but rather a new course, one that I would never have chosen otherwise. Following the election I became involved in myriad activities that I hadn't even considered being involved in previously. By losing, I found a plethora of new ways to succeed.

Former Green Bay Packers coach, Vince Lombardi, once stated, "If winning isn't everything, then why do they keep score?" My response to Mr. Lombardi is "Who's keeping score?" All too often people let competition overrun their lives. Almost everyone has a rival (whether or not his rival is even aware) and too many people are consumed by "keeping up with the Jones's." The only person you should be in competition with is yourself.

Daniel Wahlquist is a sixteen-year-old boy in his junior year at Weber High School. He has been involved in school musicals, ran track, helped the football team as team manager, is a member of Honor Society, and was recently voted by the student body as Prom King. But what sets Daniel apart from other students of the caliber? Daniel is one of four-hundred thousand Americans diagnosed with Downs Syndrome (NDSS). Because of his handicap Daniel comes in last at his track meets, is unable to sing on key, and will never be able to play in a football game. What makes Daniel one of the most loved members of Weber High's large student body is that he doesn't care that he isn't the most talented singer, runner or football player. All he cares about is doing his best, and consequently, he is more successful and involved than ninety-five percent of the students at his school.

It's hard to believe, but hardly anyone cares whether or not you win or lose, and if they do care in the moment, it's likely they'll forget as time progresses. That is why your response matters so much. Your response is what lasts. Your response is what people remember you by.

Denis Waitley remarked, "Losers live in the past. Winners learn from the past and enjoy working in the present toward the future." I believe that Waitley is in denial. Winners learn from past *failures* and enjoy working in the present toward the future. If you always win, you'll never grow. I have competed in debate for three years. My first year competing, I lost every other tournament, but at each tournament I would sit next to the best debater in the room, ask them for advice, discover what would work and what wouldn't and apply it at the next tournament. The next year I placed in every tournament and became the first student from my school to qualify for the national circuit in five years. You can't help but be a loser. It's inevitable. But you cannot let your inhibitions block your way to success. Had I won my first tournament, I probably would've decided I was good enough to not have to improve. That mentality wouldn't have gotten me to nationals.

So the next time you experience a loss, don't feel languid, rather see losing as an opportunity for growth. Don't forget, you are and always will be a loser.

Sincerely

[name withheld]